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SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/FO, NEA/ELA

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TAGS: PREL PGOV PTER PINR UNSC KPAL IS SY LE

SUBJECT: LEBANON: GEAGEA SEES "MONKEYNESS" HURTING ELECTION
CAMPAIGNING

REF: A. BEIRUT 117

¶B. BEIRUT 106

Classified By: Ambassador Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d).

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) Lebanese Forces leader Samir Geagea reported to the Ambassador in a January 29 meeting that the Syrians were "anxious" about Lebanon's June 7 parliamentary elections, and may be making assassination plans (including against himself) or violence by proxy in order to sway the elections to their liking -- a victory for March 8 and its ally Free Patriotic Movement leader Michel Aoun. Geagea recounted Aoun's challenges district by district, believing Aoun faced more problems in forming electoral lists with his allies than March 14. The independent candidates, including MP Michel Murr, were problematic to both March 14 and March 8, Geagea said, because of their "monkeyness" (their propensity to act in their own interests rather than for an alliance). He deemed the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) G-2 (military intelligence) as "ineffective" because its second-in-command, Colonel Abbas Ibrahim, a "Hizballah/Syrian man," was more powerful than the actual G-2 Director, BG Edmond Fadel. Geagea scoffed at the likelihood of a Saudi-Syrian reconciliation while giving credence to the Arab Peace Initiative, but only after Palestinian elections determine which party has legitimacy. End summary.

SIANIANS "ANXIOUS" ABOUT
ELECTIONS IN LEBANON

¶2. (C) The Ambassador, accompanied by PolOff, met Lebanese Forces (LF) leader Samir Geagea, with advisors Joseph Nehme and Elie Khoury, at his residence in Maarab on January 29. According to Geagea, the Syrians are "anxious" about Lebanon's June 7 parliamentary elections because they were unsure their allies (March 8 and Free Patriotic Movement leader Michel Aoun) would win. He revealed that the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) G-2 (military intelligence) informed him, as did other sources, that the Syrians were "preparing something" against himself and his party because they consider the LF a threat in the heavily Christian districts.

¶3. (C) Confiding that he has stopped moving outside his

well-guarded fortress home and headquarters atop a mountain in the past month, Geagea said he hoped the French and the U.S. could make the Syrians aware that he knew he was their target in order to deter them. If the assassination tactic failed, he surmised, the Syrians would foment trouble in the north and the Chouf, via their proxies, Marada leader Suleiman Franjieh and Druze figure Wi'am Wahhab, respectively.

"AOUN HAS MORE PROBLEMS THAN WE DO"

¶ 14. (C) Admitting that the March 14 alliance was struggling to agree on which candidates would run in each district (Ref A) Geagea insisted that their rival Aoun has "more problems." In Zgharta, he illustrated, Franjieh formed his own list at the exclusion of any Aoun candidate, yet Fares Karam, an Aounie, reportedly is insisting on running. Aoun does not have any candidates in Akkar, Geagea said, and is competing with the SSNP for a slot on the list in Koura (Ref B).

¶ 15. (C) Aoun's son-in-law, Telecommunications Minister Gebran Bassil, has still not decided whether he will run in Batroun, Geagea relayed, where independent candidates might take votes away from Bassil. Geagea said that in Batroun, the population equally divides its support among LF, Aoun, and MP Boutros Harb of March 14. Geagea described Jbeil district as supportive of President Michel Sleiman, rather than Aoun.

¶ 16. (C) Geagea said that independent candidates in Kesarwan -- "those monkeys" -- threatened both his and Aoun's popularity. He criticized Mansour Ilbon for publicly attacking the LF and Kataeb, and said that Farid Haikal el Khazen was confusing because he is "pro-Syrian, anti-Aoun, and wants to be independent."

¶ 17. (C) Geagea remarked that March 14 does not have a credible candidate to run against Agriculture Minister Elie Skaff in Zahle, who is allied with Aoun. Zahle MP Nicholas Fattoush, elected in 2005 on March 14's list, was again a possibility for March 14, Geagea said, but he was "not liked" in his own district.

MICHEL MURR'S "MONKEYNESS"
UNHELPFUL

¶ 18. (C) "Michel Murr's monkeyness is spoiling things left and right in the Metn," Geagea declared. Geagea accused Murr of "moving back and forth" and forming lists without coordinating with anyone. According to Geagea, Murr will include one Kataeb candidate on his Metn list, even though "(Kataeb leader Amine) Gemayel is strong than Murr." Geagea sighed, "Murr's megalomania is hurting what would have been easy." He said March 14 members must take care not to push Murr back into an alliance with Aoun, and were also waiting to see if Murr could coax the Armenian Tashnak party to leave Aoun for March 14.

LAF G-2 "PARALYZED"

¶ 19. (C) Concerned about election security, Geagea said that historically the LAF G-2 would actively pursue threats, however, it was paralyzed by its director, BG Edmond Fadel, who Geagea deemed "ineffective" (Ref A). Geagea recounted that he had tried without success to push Fadel to take a more active role, but that his second-in-command, Colonel Abbas Ibrahim, is "the only one with power" and was "brought in for Hizballah." Geagea wondered if the U.S. or Sleiman could encourage Fadel to assume a stronger role.

SAUDI-SYRIAN RECONCILIATION
MERE "THEATRICS"

¶ 10. (C) Scoffing at the likelihood of a Saudi-Syrian

reconciliation, Geagea called the Saudi overtures to the Syrians as "theatrics." Geagea considered the Arab Peace Initiative a "good starting point" for newly-appointed Special Envoy George Mitchell, but not while Hamas and Fatah were divided and competing for legitimacy. Geagea posited that the Palestinians should proceed with presidential and legislative elections, saying, "Sometimes it is necessary to carry things out to the end before it can get better."

LESS CONCERNED ABOUT
PALESTINIAN TROUBLE IN LEBANON

¶11. (C) Commenting on recent attention devoted to the issue of Palestinian weapons, Geagea predicted that any trouble in the refugee camps in Lebanon would be "isolated." He noted that Fatah has the upper hand in all of the camps and coordinates with the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), making any threats fairly containable. However, he expressed concern about the Palestinian weapons outside of the camps, declaring the LAF incapable of disarming them.

COMMENT

¶12. (C) While the general assumption is that the formation of an independent Christian bloc could take votes away from Aoun, Geagea's "monkey" labeling suggests that he feels his Lebanese Forces party is threatened by such a bloc. He criticized the non-aligned Christians for their independent actions, implying they were not committed to March 14. Geagea's real concern, however, may be that his LF party would lose seats to "independent" candidates who are allied with one of his March 14 partners such as Saad Hariri rather than to him. End comment.

SISON